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ABSTRACT

Trainees in a Title XX project were taught skills in working with parents. To measure training effectiveness, a questionnaire measuring parent attitudes toward the center and the caregivers was given to parents of center children, before and after the training. The parents indicated on the second questionnaire that they were less satisfied with the level of parent/caregiver communication. However, they also indicated that they saw their child's caregiver as more open to parent initiated discussion than previously. (Author/RH)

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The Effects of Training on the Attitudes of Parents and Caregivers after a Title XX Course on 'Working with Parents'.

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Running head: Effects of Training

Abstract

Trainees in a Title XX project were taught skills in working with parents. To measure training effectiveness, a questionaire was given to parents of center children, before and after the training. The findings showed that parents indicated increased concern about the level of parent/caregiver contact but perceived greater caregiver response to parent initiated discussion.

The Effects of Training on the Attitudes of Parents and Caregivers after a Title XX Course on 'Working with Parents'

In 1980, the Early Childhood faculty at Northern Illinois University was awarded a three year Title XX grant to train day care workers in the Rockford Region. The objective of the training was to improve caregiver skills in five areas: 1) understanding child growth and development, 2) working with children with special needs, 3) planning classroom activities, 4) planning the total program, and 5) working with parents. During one training cycle of ten weeks, a major focus was the area, working with parents. As one measure of the day care worker's improved skills in parent interaction in her own setting, a survey of parent attitudes toward the center and caregivers was administered to one group of parents at the beginning and end of the training program in which their center staff was enrolled. The project training staff assumed that changes in caregiver skills of communication with and support of parents would result in measurable changes in parent attitudes.

The inclusion of content relating to parent/caregiver interaction in the training curriculum reflected the project staff's recognition of this area as a current concern in the field. Wilson (1978) reported an increase in the number of early child-

hood programs which endorsed or mandated some form of parent involvement. Since the attitudes of both parents and caregivers toward child rearing practices are significant components in surrogate child rearing environments such as day care, parent involvement in extremely important. Communication and collaboration between parent and caregiver can be mutually beneficial (Ferrar, 1978).

The training of caregivers in skills of working with parents appears generally to be accepted as a worthwhile objective in the day care literature. Specifically, instruction for caregivers should involve training in communication skills and a chance to develop competencies in initiating and maintaining parent interactions (Moshier, 1977). Face to face communication between parent and caregiver and high frequency of parent/teacher contact appear to be the major variables in improving parent/teacher interaction. (Corwin and Wagenaar, 1976) Caregivers who had high contact with parents showed significantly more positive attitudes towards working with parents than did low contact caregivers.(Moshier, 1977) In that same study, the author reported that the attitudes of caregivers in governmentally funded centers differed negatively from that of caregivers in tuition funded centers. This current study assumed that training

of caregivers which emphasized the acquisition of skills and high frequency of face to face communication would result in modified parent views of the level and kind of parent/caregiver interaction in the center in which their child was enrolled.

A review of the literature included a study by Powell (1977), The Interpersonal Relationship Between Parents and Caregivers in Day Care Settings, which was conducted using an eight question survey. The ways in which parents and caregivers managed relationships between family and day care programs was the main focus of the study. Of specific interest were the day to day exchanges between parents and staff. To measure communicative attitudes of parents and caregivers, Powell developed an instrument which included items assessing parental child rearing values, expectations of the child care center and the value of discussing family related issues and problems. The scale also assessed the respondent's satisfaction with the present level of parent/caregiver communication as well as the value of the child care center as a child development resource.

Although authors often note that parent involvement and attitudes are difficult areas in which to conduct research (Patterson, 1978), studies in the area of attitudes and attitude change are plentiful and over a number of years attitude research

has been substantiated as valid and reliable. Patterson (1978) comments that the quality of rapport which is conducive to meaningful communication with subjects who may feel at risk is difficult. Therefore, this study was planned to begin after rapport had been established between training staff and center staff; in addition, the center staff and parents in the study had known each other for several months.

It was anticipated that the result of this study would indicate a positive change in the parents attitudes in the areas listed on the survey.

Method

Subjects. During the Fall semester, 1981, the Program to Train Day Care Workers offered training at several sites. One site was chosen to be the center for this study. Nine caregivers ranging in age between 19 years and 55 years enrolled in the training. Two had B.S. in Education degrees, six had completed high school and some college study, and one had completed eighth grade. The questionaires were answered by the parents of children enrolled in the center.

Apparatus. The instrument of measurement used in this research was developed by Powell and used in a study of inter-personal relationships between parents and caregivers in day

care programs. (Powell, 1977) The following eight statements were presented:

1. I am satisfied with the current level of parent/caregiver communication at my child's center.
2. I feel parents should tell the caregiver how to handle their child specifically.
3. I feel parents and caregivers should discuss general parental expectations of the day care center.
4. I feel parents should always keep the day care center informed of family activities.
5. I feel parents and caregivers should discuss family problems as a general principle.
6. I perceive my child's day care center as a child-rearing resource to me.
7. I perceive my child's caregiver as open to discussion of day care center activities.
8. I perceive my child's caregiver as open to discussion of any parent initiated topic.

The parents were asked to indicate their position on each statement by circling one of the following:

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree

The ten week training session for caregivers included content related to parent/teacher attitudes and interactions. Caregivers were given techniques for contacting and involving parents, techniques and skills in listening and responding to others, as well as methods of conferencing and of reporting to parents. Caregivers practiced skills in role play situtations. Topics of study included the importance of privacy and rights of others as well as knowledge of community resources which could be shared with parents if appropriate.

Procedure. Full endorsement for the research was given by the director of the day care center and the study was explained to the day care workers, all of whom agreed to cooperate. The survey forms were given to the parents of children enrolled by the day care workers at the beginning of the training session. In order to keep the results of each survey private, the parents were asked to return the survey in a sealed envelope which was given to the researcher. Out of a possible 60 parents a total of 26 (or 43%) returned the survey forms. The research did not require matching the surveys; therefore, names were not required. The survey was repeated at the conclusion of the ten week session in the exact same manner. The first five weeks of the training for the day care workers emphasized study and skills for working with parents, thus allowing time for the caregivers to practice their skills.

Results.

The findings of the study showed a significant shift in response to two questions. The parents indicated on the second questionaire that they were less satisfied with the current level of communication at their child's center. They also indicated that they saw their child's caregiver as more open to parent initiated discussion than previously.

Caregivers believed that the administration of the instrument at the beginning of the study coupled with the increased emphasis on parent/caregiver interaction alerted parents to consider the questions more carefully.

Further increased attempts to be responsive to parents may have led parents to respond more honestly and openly on the second administration of the scale than they did on the first. This is supported by parent perception that caregivers were more responsive to parent initiated discussions. This modified view of caregiver interest encouraged the center staff to continue their efforts to increase and improve parent contact.

Administering the scale before and at the conclusion of the study is a weakness in the research design since it may be considered to be, in essence, a treatment. The pretest was used in this pilot study in absence of other controls.

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